



## **BREAKING CHAINS**

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*"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free!" (Galatians 5:1)*

*"So if the Son sets you free, you are truly free." (John 8:36)*

By the hard fought, and hard won efforts of millions of men and women who have believed in American ideals, you and I get to live in "the land of the free and the home of the brave."

Even if you're on your way to jail, or you feel imprisoned by your job, or you are subjected to the will of another person, we still live in a land where freedom reigns, and your personal freedom is always a possibility.

I dreamt of a prison, full of inmates—some violent, others orderly—that had been abandoned. The inmates frequently complained about the food (which was grown and prepared onsite), the noise in the cellblocks, the work details, the lack of privileges, and the lack of certain material comforts.

Little by little, they managed to open most of the cell doors, providing most of them with significant freedom, yet they continued to argue and fight with one another over turf and control. They badmouthed the system that put them there.

A few actually tested the exterior doors, only to find them unlocked, and they escaped. But most never tested them, because they were preoccupied with trying to improve life (at least for themselves) inside the prison house.

And a Voice asked me, "What is preoccupying *you*?"

Upon reflection, I asked myself, "Am I preoccupied with complaining about this or that, setting right this or that, or controlling this or that, and missing the purposeful blessing God has crafted for me?"

Am I really advancing the Kingdom of God or just rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic?

And what about you? If you disappeared this week, would you be missed? If our church collapsed, would Marin County notice?

If not, whose fault is that?

Do we assume that just because we are here, others should be pleased? Do we assume that we are entitled to notoriety, because we are people of faith?

Jesus Christ, in His day, was neither well-known, nor well-loved by most of His contemporaries; He was an obscure Jewish preacher, who was killed by the religious leaders of the time.

But then, God Himself, the Creator of the ends of the earth, has ever been obscure to His creation. Invisible to the eye, yet worthy of all praise!

I wonder if we make similar assumptions about our freedom?

Our freedom does not exist in a vacuum. We are responsible for its upkeep. Yet many seem to want freedom without personal responsibility. I'm sorry. Freedom has never been an entitlement.

Today, we're experiencing much talk, much contention, and much confusion, about freedom.

## **Freedom Of**

Bill of Rights was written to guarantee the citizens of the United States certain freedoms: let's call them our "freedom of" – freedom of speech, of the press, of religion, of peaceful assembly.

According to Paul's letter to the church in Rome (13:4), human government was instituted by God to promote and secure such liberties.

But can a person become a *slave* to their own freedom? If I must have my rights honored in order to enjoy life, am I really free, or am I a slave to my right, my passion, my impulse?

Paul challenged the church in Rome, the capital of the Empire, with this question: *"Don't you realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey?"* (Romans 6:16)

Then, Paul revealed his superpower: *"I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. <sup>12</sup> I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. <sup>13</sup> For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength."* (Philippians 4:11-13)

True freedom—Christian freedom—is both a freedom *to* and a freedom *not to*.

If freedom means my human rights must always be honored or I will object and be offended, Jesus would never have made it to the cross.

When my insistence upon the exercise of my freedom finds itself at odds with Jesus' command to "love your neighbor," then I need to surrender my freedom and become a slave of Christ, instead of the slave of my own freedom.

## **Freedom From**

I have just spoken of "freedom of." However, most often, what people want is "freedom from" – freedom from restraints, freedom from rules, freedom from scrutiny.

We would prefer to live as described in Judges 21:25 – *"In those days Israel had no king; all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes."*

Freedom of speech has turned into freedom *from* hearing the views of others who differ with mine.

Freedom of religion has become freedom *from* any evidence of religion.

Freedom of assembly has turned into "I can do or say anything I like to you or your property, and you can't stop me!"

Today's enemies are not national but ideological, and without boundaries. They are not overt; they are subtle.

Does the Gospel of Jesus Christ break chains of oppression? Yes. But how? Through political reform? Never directly. First, through personal transformation; then, social transformation; then, those transformed people and social groups affect religious, political, scientific, technological, or theological changes.

The challenges of our days are not just outward, but also inward. In fact, *first* inward.

Our real opponents are not our neighbors—not flesh and blood at all—but divisive and destructive spirits who motivate people to serve their wicked purposes. Spirits, who promise us freedoms, as they lure us into bondage.

God did indeed create all people free, but it is we, even though we are free, who submit ourselves to slavery... and sometimes, it is slavery to our own rights, to our own privilege, to our own sense of freedom.

So, when we find ourselves insisting upon our freedoms... our rights... maybe we should pause to do a heart check and evaluate whether we are, in that moment, truly free to “act or not act”... to “have or not have”... to “say or not say”. And in the end, ask ourselves, “What is the most loving thing I can do or say?”

*“You are not slaves; you are free. But your freedom is not an excuse to do evil. You are free to live as God's slaves.” (1 Peter 2:16)*

## **Freedom For**

The Bill of Rights offers “freedom of.” The world offers “freedom from.” And the Gospel offers us (and all humanity) “freedom for” – for the purpose of impact (where the Kingdom of Heaven meets earth).

When Paul and Silas were confined to the jail in Philippi, beaten severely and chained in stocks in the dungeon, they didn’t cry to the Lord about the abuse of their rights. Instead, they worshiped Him in song, until the prison shook and they were set free! But not before the jailer and all his family came to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ!

*Though sorrows befall us and evils oppose  
God leads His dear children along  
Through grace we can conquer, defeat all our foes  
God leads His dear children along*

*Some through the waters, some through the flood  
Some through the fire, but all through the blood  
Some through great sorrow, but God gives a song  
In the night season and all the day long*

(God Leads Us Along – Burgess, Krogstad, Young)

Christian freedom is not freedom *from* rules, but freedom *to live* an orderly life by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Christian freedom is not freedom *from* obedience, but freedom *to serve* one another for God’s purposes.

It is freedom to forgive when judgment is deserved. It is freedom to love when love is *not* deserved (the way Jesus Christ loves us).

The Gospel of Jesus Christ does not offer personal perfection (none of us has arrived), but it does offer perpetual personal promise: if we keep following Jesus, we will certainly improve. We will have more peace, more joy, more love. And not only we, but also those around us.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is still the greatest guarantee of personal and national freedom.

So, today we celebrate the deepest freedom known to humanity.

Today we celebrate the strongest freedom in the earth.

Today we celebrate the most enduring freedom to be experienced.

*"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free!"* (Galatians 5:1)

*"So if the Son sets you free, you are truly free."* (John 8:36)

To be a Christian *and* an American is the greatest experience of freedom there is.

Do not waste it.

Respect it. Sustain it. Share it.